

**From:** Thomas Wieczorek [<mailto:twieczorek@icma.org>]  
**Sent:** Friday, August 30, 2013 3:48 PM  
**To:** Moore Jonathan; Moore Lori  
**Subject:** Recent meetings

Good afternoon!

I enjoyed seeing you both at the Esri conference in San Diego and the IAFC-FRI event in Chicago. I wanted to take a minute to follow up on your recent Redmond Fire Symposium event which touched on a topic we discussed.

I have now pretty much re-organized and restructured the fire reporting and analytics portion of ICMA. I believe you noted that we present a much different product and still have more to do – centered around data and performance comparatives. I am going to be participating in a panel that addresses an issue that still seems to divide us – public safety – at our annual conference. I hope to address some of the success (and there are some) as well as the fallacies that have been created over the years.

In watching the presentation of Mark Docherty and Monte Nigh, I would say that I agree with what much of what was presented but would also ask that we research the ability to “correct the record.”

1. **ICMA does not endorse public safety.** As a matter of fact, we have presented public safety as an option in six cases and those developed because the fire chief stated he/she could not attract volunteers and the level of paid firefighters had dropped to what I consider a dangerous level. It takes bodies to fight a fire – no way around that. If the chief tells me they can't get help and I look at the city budget and find that they are running a deficit, then I know that there is no hope in getting more paid personnel. If the police are not busy (or DPW, or Parks, or anywhere else), I will suggest training them to fight fire. I guess I look at it more like volunteers but wage and hour laws say they are full time employees and must be compensated as such.
2. **ICMA does not push public safety.** With the exception of a chief of a smaller department telling us he/she cannot get help, I don't know where we have pushed public safety. I actually tried to call Bay City, Michigan's city manager to tell him he was not going to be successful because the decision was made to go to public safety without ever looking at workloads. We find that if the workloads of the agencies are both more than 33% (we recommend police be 33% on calls, 33% admin time, and 33% for patrol), it is unlikely there is time to do all of the duties of another discipline. We recently prepared a study with CALEA that will be released that looks at the capacity of police. The problem is that most of our members do not understand workloads, most police chiefs like to use “officers per thousand” and few fire chiefs or fire staffs have been trained to look at workloads.
3. **I will be telling city managers that if they are looking to save money, then they probably should be looking at something other than public safety.** I have made this quite clear in all of our presentations – it costs money to convert.
4. **I agree with your presenters** – there is a problem in Michigan and it begins with the Michigan Fire Fighter's Training Council. When I was chief, I tried to get some changes to professionalize the presentation of training and had lobbied my state senator and representative to support that effort. However, they talked to the volunteer firefighters in their district and chiefs and were told it would push many of their members out because they could not pass a more robust education program. I have now been gone 8 years so I'm not sure if it got better but the reason people challenged the test is that the training was so utterly basic that one could pass without

even taking it. That is something that is found in many areas of the country and might be something both of our organizations could try to pursue. The best model I think I saw was in the northwest and Florida where training is conducted through community college. It is consistent, well done, and challenging.

5. I believe it was Mark that made light of the fact public safety is now taking up 50 to 80% of many budgets because “they have eliminated parks and pretty much everything else.” The bottom line is that 50 to 80% is not sustainable. That is the challenge municipal officials and employees have to address. You cannot have public safety costs eating up 80% of the budget or else that is all a community can offer which results in citizens looking either to green fields for development or doing away with cities. That benefits neither your members or mine.
6. We, too, share your concerns on the MSU study. I reached out to the gentleman doing the study as a former chief, director, city manager, and head of CPSE and have never been contacted for this project. I share your concerns of what the outcome might be if for no other reason than perhaps he might have wanted to question our members and financial experts on issues related to public safety.

When I was asked to become chief of the Ionia Fire Department, the decision had already been made to go to public safety. After my first day, I realized there was likely not a need to go public safety but instead there was a need to professionalize the full time firefighters and department. The time was too late. I lay blame at the feet of the chiefs prior to me and the laissez-faire attitude that had engulfed the members of the department. We instituted an aggressive education program of all age levels, began inspections of all commercial and industrial facilities, and created a comprehensive training and education program both for staff as well as the public. Perhaps that is why I think public safety was viewed positively in the community; we suddenly were out, visible, and putting forth our presence everywhere you looked.

I also think our police benefited from the merger because firefighters make much better community policing officers than traditional police. Ionia recently promoted a new school liaison officer to replace one who retired at the end of last year. I hired both as firefighters and both came from the firefighter background (both were long term volunteers and one’s father was chief of a volunteer department south of our county).

I would offer to do a webinar for your members describing these areas and have no problem with questions. I also think we have to address the next generation of officers and chiefs because that is why public safety is usually created and why police are put in charge. Police come armed with facts, data, charts, numbers, and professional presentations. Unfortunately I continue to have almost had to drag out “standard of response” from some fairly good sized fire chiefs so I hesitate to mention “Integrated Risk Management Planning.”

Please discuss this offer and I actually do look for opportunities that we might work together. I realize I am representing the management side and you the labor but I’ve been on both and the service to our ultimate customer – the citizen -- seems like a point we all do agree upon.

Sincerely,

Tom

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